



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HOMELESS COURT PROGRAM WINS NATIONAL RECOGNITION *County program named in "the Oscar's" of government awards*

A groundbreaking program that helps the homeless resolve outstanding legal issues has been recognized in a contest that honors the best in public service.

Homeless Court Program was named as a finalist in the annual Innovations in Government Award, given by the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

The program was one of 15 finalists named, but did not win the final awards announced July 28. The contest is often referred to as the Oscar's of government awards programs.

Homeless Court will be in session Wednesday (Aug. 18) at the Vietnam Veterans of San Diego, 4141 Pacific Highway. Court sessions will start at 2 p.m. Media are invited to attend but will be asked to get permission of the homeless before photographs or video is taken.

Homeless Court was launched in 1989 after a survey determined that a large number of homeless veterans had outstanding misdemeanor citations. Many of the homeless did not go to the courts to settle their legal problems, resulting in a backlog of cases for local courts.

County officials worked with local homeless advocates and the courts to stage a Homeless Court at Stand Down, an annual event that provides assistance to homeless veterans. From that once-a-year event, the Homeless Court Program has evolved into monthly court sessions.

Since 1989, the program has helped 942 people resolve 4,895 cases. It has won other awards and become a model for similar programs throughout the state. Participants in the sessions are often sentenced to activities to help them get off the streets, such as meetings on handling substance abuse problems and literacy programs.

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